



'IN THE SPOTLIGHT'

Each month we put a different person 'in the spotlight' and pose 12 wide-ranging questions to them. This month, we feature **Philip Douch, short story writer, playwright and performer based in Stroud, and a previous performer at Evesham Festival of Words.**

1. Tell us an interesting fact about yourself that not many people know.

I was on a winning team for the TV show 'Eggheads'. This is probably best left without further explanation as it sounds more impressive than it actually was! The team comprised four of a larger group of us who were setting up a charity supporting disabled adults and our significant winnings were to fund some of the work. I did answer a couple of questions right but must confess that I lost my head-to-head with one of the resident Eggheads. But others in the team were more successful, so the glory was duly shared.....(if not the money).

2. What book made most impact on you as a child?

Although I write a lot, I am strangely not an avid reader. All advice to writers says I should be. I have an English degree too but really only read what I needed to. I can recall a few books from when I was very young – 'Puffy the Puppy is fat and well fed; Puffy the Puppy's asleep in his bed'; and 'Tootles the Taxi' – a collection of innocuous rhymes about various anthropomorphised means of transport (I've just looked that up and learned that anthropomorph-ing is not just for animals).

However, if being 17 counts as a child, I studied Tom Stoppard's 'Jumpers' at A-level and loved his ability to write beautifully crafted speeches and a play that revelled in words whilst being simultaneously profound and funny. I think that some of my own best writing follows in that spirit.

3. What is your favourite film, and why?

Tricky one. I really like 'Paddington'! – partly for its warmth and not least for bits of language play. On the Underground the sign at the moving staircase says 'Dogs must be carried', so the logical little bear hunts around to take a dog off a passer-by in the belief that he is thereby permitted to go down the escalator.

I very much like 'About a Boy' too, adapted from the Nick Hornby novel.



4. What are your main hobbies/interests, apart from reading, of course?

Well, there's that very assumption about a writer built in to the question! I do quite enjoy reading, but I don't do it very often. I write short stories designed for me to read aloud to grown-ups, and I write plays.

I enjoy performing, sometimes in plays and sometimes in my own largely ludicrous one man shows. Otherwise, I have a life-long adherence to Southampton Football Club, which offers more than enough grief, misery and baseless longing for anyone to endure.

5. What would be the three things you would like to have if you were stranded on a desert island?

Assuming a laptop with miraculous connectivity is not within the rules of engagement here, limitless pen and paper. As you might have guessed, I would miss writing more than reading.

Maybe a guitar, since I do have one and used to spend time fairly unsuccessfully trying to get better at it. I'd need limitless song books with easy-play chords too – and would probably end up writing my own stuff as well as playing badly.

And perhaps a monster pile of packets of Sainsbury's peanuts, raisins and chocolate buttons (though if foodstuff is permitted, maybe I'd be better advised to go for a whole barbecued pig or something) - though I cling tightly to my secondary school Music master's written advice letter for school trips that 'nuts, fruit and chocolate are particularly sustaining'.

N.B. One of my sons once mused in regard to this sort of question that he could never understand why nobody ever said 'a boat'.

6. What would a look at your bookshelves tell us about you?

- (i) that I do not dust sufficiently frequently.
- (ii) that someone who lives here reads voraciously (my wife Jane).
- (iii) that I might have an interest in how to live a good life despite not committing to a recognised path.

7. If you could invite any three people, dead or alive, to a dinner party, who would they be, and why?

Well, nobody dead 'cos they'd just lie there, wouldn't they?

I'd never thought about this until just now. And it's not at all obvious. Obama? Intelligent and interesting. Billy Connolly? I love his zest for living; and he might be quite amusing! And



someone who could cook. Which might well be Jane – also because she'd still be there when the others had left and it would be good to have someone to remember it with.

8. What kind of music do you like, and is there one favourite soundtrack?

Most of my music would probably merit a sneer from any music cognoscenti. Not much knowledge of classical beyond a few standards, and not much knowledge of anything before my late teens (so early 1970s) or anything very challenging since. I like melody, especially voice and piano (Billy Joel? The ancient and virtually unknown Jonathan Kelly anyone? Al Stewart – not much piano there though). Non-traditional folky stuff (Show of Hands; Ralph McTell). And I have a weakness for pairs of women harmonizing – Ward Thomas; Indigo Girls).

One track? Blue Rose Code singing 'Edina'
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPOyHs1Bpto> Just beautiful. And I seem to have something inside me that draws me to a soft Scottish accent.

9. What are your favourite charities/good causes, and why?

I co-founded and led Active Impact – a Gloucestershire social enterprise, now charity – ten years or so ago, to support other organisations to include disabled young people in their ordinary activities. I still do bits of work there now, particularly training. See questions 10 and 12 for why!

Otherwise I am increasingly concerned about the climate emergency and am looking to support actions that might prompt system change. I don't think this is really a charity or a good cause. But it's something critically important outside of my normal work or personal life.

10. Who is the person who has influenced you most/you most admire?

So I'm side-stepping this one by citing an event and a collection of people rather than a particular individual. When I was 16/17 I signed up for a week's residential volunteering holiday with the Toc H charity after seeing a booklet on the wall in the Divinity Room (Room 5) at school. I had the most extraordinary time living and playing with a dozen volunteers and a dozen disabled kids, none of whom I'd ever met. It was knackered, eye-opening and hilarious. Much of what I have done in my adult working life has stemmed from that formative experience.



11. What is your connection to Evesham?

I performed in the first Festival of Words – and my now 92 year old mum was head girl at Prince Henry's when she grew up in Childswickham.

12. What would you list as your greatest achievement to date?

Gosh! Probably not Eggheads for a start. I hit a six for my school cricket team during my match-winning innings in the final of the Altham Memorial Cup at Hampshire's county ground in Southampton (very short boundary, but bowler Tim Tremlett did go on to play for the county as an adult).

More seriously I am proud of my book 'The Busker's Guide to Inclusion', which has sold over 15,000 copies across several countries, and the extensive training I've done on including disabled kids over many years. And I co-founded the Mobiloo, a mobile changing facility with hoist and changing table, enabling many disabled people to enjoy events and activities that would otherwise be inaccessible to them without appropriate toilet facilities.

Creatively, maybe a short film made with The Cotswold Players pre-lockdown, written and performed by myself - in which I perform my own writing –

https://www.dropbox.com/s/whctb3er6evm7pk/Jeannie_Master.mp4?dl=0

And I'd be very chuffed if a play about a feisty young disabled woman, currently being read by a leading light in disability theatre in London, might one day be professionally performed. I think it is perhaps the best thing I've written.

Finally, is being married an achievement? 'Cos I still am / we still are.